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Talking Points for DDI

An Iranian Invasion of Iraq

I. Military Goals and Likely Scenarios

Based on their present deployments, Iranian forces probably intend to advance to the bank of the Shatt al Arab opposite Basrah during their upcoming offensive.

--We have no evidence that they are training on the types of bridges and boats necessary to cross the Shatt.

The battle is likely to be bloody and could end in an Iraqi rout.

--The most likely scenario is an Iranian advance to the east bank of the Shatt with the bulk of the Iraqi Army escaping.

--The Iraqi forces would then dig in along the west bank, large numbers of refugees would flee and Saddam Husayn probably would survive initially with mounting political problems.

Iranian forces at the Shatt likely would pause for several weeks to regroup and resupply and to assess the situation in Iraq and await Saddam's downfall.

--If Saddam survives, Tehran would have to decide whether to cross the Shatt or to push into Iraq at other points, such as northeast of Al Amarah or near Qasr-e Shirin.

--If the Iranians cross the Shatt, they likely would swing south and west of Basrah to envelop it. They also would try to cut the main highway from Kuwait to Iraq--nearly all Soviet military supplies to Iraq are delivered along this road.

Such an advance would likely push large numbers of Iraqi troops and refugees into Kuwait and result in some Iranian forces arriving at the Kuwaiti border.

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militarily usable quantities of mustard gas. If the Iraqis have the gas, they may decide to use it, especially if the Iranians were to press an invasion beyond the Shatt.

II. Political Goals

✓ The primary and most immediate goal of an Iranian invasion of Iraq seems limited to the removal of Saddam Husayn, but not necessarily the entire Ba'thist regime.

--We have seen no evidence that Tehran is grooming a successor government from among the Iraqi Shia militants it supports. Indeed, unconfirmed reporting suggests that strains exist between the Khomeini regime and its Iraqi supplicants, who bridle at Iranian attempts to dictate.

--Several Iranian leaders have publicly argued that Tehran could not demand reparations from an Islamic government in Baghdad--reparations that Tehran views as key to helping the Iranian economy recover from its depressed condition.

--Continuing tension with Iraq seems to serve near-term Iranian interests: it keeps its own military preoccupied, allows the regime to divert public attention to a common external enemy, and provides justification for austerity at home.

✓ Once an invasion was underway, however, and depending on how it unfolded, Iran might change its present thinking and push for its ultimate goal--the imposition of an Islamic government in Baghdad subservient to Tehran.

✓ Success may breed ambition. If the Iraqi forces were routed, the Iranians might see little reason to halt their own momentum. They might undertake succeeding offensives in the hope that the regime in Baghdad and the Iraqi Army would unravel.

--Even a bloody, prolonged battle to get to the Shatt might cause Tehran to increase its demands in an effort to keep them commensurate with its losses of men, materiel, and money.

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--Iran, for example, could decide to press for its goal of unimpeded access to Najaf and Karbala--the two holiest cities of Shia Islam--with the underlying threat that it would try to achieve this militarily if access were not granted by a regime in Baghdad.

✓ Even Iran's success in achieving its intermediate goal of Saddam's removal would further the Iranian ambition of hegemony in the Gulf.

--Saddam's downfall would give renewed impetus to Iranian intentions to modify the policies of or change the regimes in the Gulf states. It would set a precedent of Iranian success for demanding the ouster of any regime or individual leader it opposes.

--In any event, continuing Iranian successes against Iraq are likely to spur Tehran's efforts to intimidate and subvert these states, silencing those in Tehran who have been arguing for a more cautious approach. Saudi Arabia, which Iran considers a rival for leadership of the Muslim world, likely will be a prime target.

III. Selected Arab Actions and Reactions

Jordan

✓ King Hussein probably would confine himself to diplomatic efforts to get the fighting stopped and to line up support for Saddam Husayn. He is unlikely to provide much, if any, concrete help.

--The Jordanian Army is small--only some 58,000 men--and because of manpower shortages has been unable to attain its authorized strength of 69,000. The King was painfully aware of these and other military limitations during the confrontation with Syria in late 1980.

--Even if an Arab military intervention were proposed, it is doubtful that King Hussein could provide more than a symbolic force.

✓ An Iranian invasion is, in fact, likely to fortify Hussein's conviction that he must concentrate on Jordan's own security problems.

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--He is deeply worried over Jordan's vulnerable position if the PLO moves from Lebanon to Syria.

--He believes the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a first step toward implementation of Sharon's concept of a Palestinian homeland in Jordan.

--Events in Lebanon probably have convinced the King that he cannot rely on the US to protect him from Israeli designs or from events in Iraq or Iran.

✓ Jordan's greatest worry would be the replacement of Saddam Husayn's regime by any Iraqi Government allied with Iran.

--In addition to the obvious threat from across the border, the King would be concerned about an upsurge of radicalism and Islamic fundamentalism at home--especially among the Palestinian majority.

--He knows he can do little to avert this possibility.

--His response would be to focus more intently on internal security and the defense of Jordan's borders. He might seek to speed his rapprochement with Egypt as the only moderate Arab source of protection.

Saudi Arabia

✓ The Saudis probably would not reduce their support of Iraq if Iran invaded.

--Iran has challenged the Saudi ruling family's right to Islamic leadership, and the Saudis see little to be gained by trying to appease Tehran.

--The Saudis do not expect invasion alone to cause Saddam Husayn's downfall, though they would support political change in Baghdad if it helped end the war without bringing to power a pro-Iranian government.

--The Saudis, prodded by Iraq, will press the United States for quick action by the UN Security Council.

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✓ Saudi anxieties for their own security will, of course, increase, but they will probably still see subversion--including of their neighbors--as the main threat.

--They will worry more that Iranian military success will boost revolutionary Islamic themes in the Arab world.

The Saudi pattern in time of crisis is to turn for help from outside powers.

--Private--even public--demonstrations of support from the US would probably be welcome initially.

--The Iranian threat--not Lebanon--will be the dominant Saudi concern following an invasion.

--Riyadh will be more anxious than before that events in Lebanon not further incite Arab popular opinion against the US and thereby jeopardize security cooperation with the US aimed at thwarting the Iranian threat.

Kuwait

Kuwait will not prove a steadfast ally for Iraq.

--Kuwait sees itself as the helpless victim of more powerful states, and it will accommodate itself to the power realities that develop.

--If Iranian troops move close to its border, Kuwait will look for ways to appease Iran, including the ending of aid to Iraq.

--Kuwait would probably give sanctuary to refugees; it would seek to prevent military use of its territory by Iraq, but could not prevent it if Iraq was determined.

Kuwait will not see either superpower as the answer to its dilemma of being caught between its two larger neighbors.

--Kuwait does not see the Soviets as having sufficient influence in either Tehran or Baghdad to affect the course of the war.

--US promises of support would be seen as less certain than the threat from Iran.